No Objection To Declassification in Full 2011/04/29 : LOC-HAK-136-7-17-5

Geneviève Chauvel—Gamma

UPI

West of Suez: Sadat at canal; amphibious tanks training for a crossing

Anwar Sadat's Uncertain Trumpet

Few world leaders can match Egypt's President Anwar Sadat for verbal overkill. Back in 1971, he declared that the "year of decision" was at hand, and when he failed to meet a succession of self-imposed deadlines for recapturing Israeli-occupied territory, he simply flipped a page of the calendar and marked 1972 as the year for the "inevitable" battle. Nothing ever came of these threats, and for a while it seemed that Sadat had lost his taste for predicting the impossible. But last week, the Egyptian leader was rattling his sabers again—and this time he vowed that he meant exactly what he said. In a speech to the Egyptian People's Assembly, he proclaimed an "era of total confrontation" with Israel. And he followed that up in an exclusive interview with NEWSWEEK Senior Editor Arnaud de Borchgrave by insisting that "everything in this country is now being mobilized in earnest for a resumption of the battle."

In view of Sadat's track record, most Mideast experts were inclined to interpret his outburst as a ploy designed to stifle mounting domestic criticism of his do-nothing regime. In addition, his threat was a clear attempt to impress upon the Nixon Administration that the Mideast was about to explode once again—unless Washington pressures its Israeli client into making significant diplomatic concessions. But although skepticism about Sadat's ultimate military intentions was warranted, they could not be dismissed out of hand. Like Gamal Abdel Nasser in the summer of 1967, Sadat is in serious trouble both at home and abroad, and he may just be desperate enough to talk himself into going to war against Israel.

Sadat himself was making every effort to convince the world that he was not bluffing. To stiffen the home front for the struggle, he gave his Cabinet a thorough shake-up last week, appointing himself as Premier and Military Governor-General —thus acquiring more power than even Nasser had in his heyday. With Egypt under virtual martial law, Sadat ordered a series of air-raid drills and blackouts. Other evidence that Sadat may be in deadly earnest came in a recent secret session with Egypt's top editors. Pounding his knee with a clenched fist, Sadat berated the journalists for doubting that he was serious about the "coming battle of liberation," and he intimated that even Mohammed Hassanein Heikal, the powerful editor of Al Ahram, would have to submit to censorship.

'Nightmare': In his interview with de Borchgrave (page 44), Sadat stressed that "the time has come for a shock." He did not close the door on a diplomatic settlement. But he insisted that unless there is a "peace based on justice," there "will be the nightmare to end all nightmares—and everybody will be losers." Privately, Sadat's aides told correspondent de Borchgrave that the Egyptian President was not contemplating anything as suicidal as a full-fledged amphibious attack across the Suez Canal. Rather, what Sadat appears to have in mind is a limited military gesture—commando raids into the Sinai combined with a resumption of artillery shelling across the canal—to provoke the Western world into taking diplomatic action.

De Borchgrave also learned that, in the event of war, Sadat might encourage Palestinian guerrillas to blow up oil lines in the Persian Gulf, thereby shutting off the flow of oil to Western Europe and Japan. Indeed, President Sadat has apparently been laying such plans for the past sixteen months. De Borchgrave brought back several hitherto untold tales of aborted Egyptian operations against Israel:

Back in December 1971, Sadat was ready to launch a strike against Israel. Fifty fighter-bombers were to fly a "deep-penetration" raid into Israeli-occupied Sinai. But the plan was canceled at the last minute because of the worsening India-Pakistan crisis—which Sadat felt would dwarf whatever crisis he could trigger in the Middle East. Then again, a few weeks after Soviet military personnel were expelled from Egypt in July 1972, Sadat ordered his then War Minister, Gen. Mohammed Sadek, to drop a parachute brigade in the Sinai and hold a beachhead for a week to ten days. During that time, the United Nations Security Council was to be called into session, Libya was to close its oil taps (which supply Western Europe with upwards of 25 per cent of its oil) and enormous pressure was to be brought to bear on Washington to force Israel to withdraw from the Arab territories it has occupied.

Refusal: Sadek, Egypt's most popular general and the man behind the ouster of the Russians, flatly refused to carry out the order—on the ground that the "home front" was not prepared for massive Israeli reprisals. Sadek apparently did not add that the army was not ready either and that it had only enough ammunition for three days of peak-intensity fighting. General Sadek's refusal to comply forced Sadat to postpone his opera-

No Objection To Declassification in Full 2011/04/29 : LOC-HAK-136-7-17-5

No Objection To Declassification in Full 2011/04/29 : LOC-HAK-136-7-17-5

Israeli commandos: Back to war?

tion. But two months later, he fired the general for his insubordination.

Since then, Sadat has bided his time, but in February his desire to strike out at the Israelis was piqued by a daring —and until now unreported—Israeli commando raid on Egyptian territory. Egyptian radar picked up what looked like four Israeli helicopters crossing the frontier. But in reality there were eight choppers, flying close together in pairs. An alert was sounded, then immediately canceled when the radar screens spotted the four blips heading back to Israeli-held territory. What the Egyptians did not know was that the four other Israeli choppers, painted with Egyptian markings, remained behind on the ground. Then Israeli commandos, clad in Egyptian uniforms, captured several Egyptian staff officers and spirited them back to Israel.

In Washington and Jerusalem, Sadat's latest moves were received with a studied calm, since Israel has made it clear that its air force will not hesitate to devastate the Egyptians in the event of even a limited war. The Israelis should have little trouble doing just that. A recent report in a British paper claims that a Soviet rocket team, which recently returned to Egypt to inspect the missile-defense system, was "appalled" by the state of disrepair and neglect it discovered. The Israelis, the Russians concluded, could sweep the length and breadth of Egypt practically unopposed and wipe out the country's air defenses just as quickly as they did on the morning of June 5, 1967.

Nor do the Israelis believe that Sadat's Arab allies would be of much help in the event of renewed fighting. Jordan has made it plain that it will not fight another war against Israel, and any intervention by Syria would lead to ruinous Israeli air reprisals. Libya, despite the bellicosity of its strongman, Col. Muammar Kaddafi, has no functioning air force worth the name. "These are the realities," says one Israeli military expert. "It would make no sense for Sadat to fly in their face."

All this may be true—but it still does not rule out the possibility of a new Arab-Israeli conflict. According to de Borchgrave's sources in Egypt, the Russians have given Cairo the impression that they would not be too upset by a "limited military action." And as a result of recent visits to Moscow by Egyptian officials, the Soviets have agreed to resume the flow of military hardware and spare parts that was cut back after their humiliating ouster from Egypt last year. Among the new armaments is a ground-to-ground missile with a conventional warhead that can reach deep inside Israeli territory.

According to some Egyptians, the Russians now believe that a limited action by Egypt would stir such a commotion in Europe that the U.S. would be compelled to force concessions out of Israel. But other sources in Cairo have a more Byzantine explanation for Soviet motives. The Russians, according to this theory, are convinced that Egypt would suffer another crushing defeat, and that in turn would mean the end of the Sadat regime and the installation of a leftist, pro-Moscow government. Some reports have it that Egyptian intelligence has even discovered documents outlining the various stages of a popular uprising in Cairo, to be led by students and leftist army elements and armed with equipment seized from Egyptian units routed by the Israelis.

Disaster: Sadat is aware of the fact that he might not survive another defeat at the hands of the Israelis. And yet, say his closest aides, he has become convinced that Egypt has little to lose by a resumption of fighting. Even if Egypt should suffer a disaster, Sadat reasons, it would be a loss similar to the Vietnamese Communist setback during the offensives of 1968 and 1972—a military defeat but a psychological victory. Says one of the President's confidants: "We must remind the world that Israel still occupies our country and that we are prepared to die by the thousands for national liberation."

In addition, Sadat is under increasing pressure from Libya's militant Colonel Kaddafi, whose oil money helps keep the Egyptian economy afloat. Sadat is also being urged by younger Egyptian army officers, Palestinian commandos and a wide range of domestic hawks to "do something" to recover the territories lost to Israel. Thus, no matter how irrational such a move might be, a desperate and frustrated Sadat could succumb to these pressures and give the order to attack. "He is cornered on all sides," concedes one of his advisers, "and this, I'm afraid, makes President Sadat a dangerous man."

'The Battle Is Now Inevitable'

Following his public disclosures last week that Egypt was preparing for "total confrontation" with Israel, President Anwar Sadat granted an exclusive interview to NEWSWEEK Senior Editor Arnaud de Borchgrave and spelled out the reasons for his action:

De Borchgrave: Last month, you sent Hafez Ismail, your top adviser, to Washington to meet with President Nixon, Henry Kissinger and Secretary of State William Rogers. What happened?

Sadat: If Hafez Ismail had conducted these talks with Golda Meir, the results would have been less ridiculous. [The Americans] asked for a declaration about the legitimate position of the Israeli case. Also for one-sided commitments for the benefit of Israel. For the demilitarization of Sinai. They have not and will not exert any pressure on Israel. Quite the contrary. For the first time, we see total and complete agreement between the U.S. and Israel on Middle Eastern policy. [Israeli Foreign Minister Abba] Eban confirmed it. No one in Washington denied it. And on the heels of Hafez Ismail's mission, Washington released the details of the new Phantom deal and aid for the development of Israel's new homemade fighter-bomber.

Alexandra de Borchgrave

Sadat: 'The situation is hopeless'

No Objection To Declassification in Full 2011/04/29 : LOC-HAK-136-7-17-5

No Objection To Declassification in Full 2011/04/29 : LOC-HAK-136-7-17-5

Everything was discouraging. Complete failure and despair sums it up.

Q. Are you still prepared, as you told me you were two years ago, to sign a final peace agreement with Israel in return for a total Israeli troop withdrawal?

A. When I made my initiative in February 1971, I was genuine and told the U.S. it was a test of peace. Secretary Rogers told me it was now up to Israel. But Israel told the U.S. it was just the beginning of Egyptian concessions. [Last month] I told Nixon I wanted a successful effort with the U.S. for an over-all settlement. I made it very clear—let's take the occupation of our land out of the debate and begin to look at a complete solution and a vision of the future for the area for decades to come. So my intentions were quite clear. Yes, I want a final peace agreement with Israel. But there was no response from the U.S. or Israel—except to supply Israel with more Phantoms.

Q. Has Washington indicated there will be another U.S. initiative after Soviet party chief Brezhnev's visit to Washington in June?

A. No sign of anything. My main difficulty with the U.S. ever since my first correspondence with Nixon on Dec. 24, 1970, has been to get the Administration to take a position in the conflict and put it on paper. To this day there is no solid position paper on the whole problem. Rogers has said that America's commitment to Israel does not extend to the occupation of our land. But that never became official policy. All we see is retrogression—to the point where Eban now states policy for the U.S.

Q. Wouldn't the advantage go to the side that takes a positive diplomatic initiative to break the deadlock?

A. I have just completed contacts with all of the Big Five, including China, with West and East Europeans and the nonaligned countries. There is only one conclusion—if we don't take our case in our own hands, there will be no movement, especially given Washington's ridiculous ideas evidenced by Hafez Ismail's trip. I'm not begging. There is no sense turning the clock back. Everything I've done leads to pressure for more concessions. I was even told by Rogers that my initiative for a final peace agreement with Israel was very courageous and had transformed the situation. Every door I have opened has been slammed in my face by Israel—with American blessings.

Q. Couldn't you add a fresh dimension by giving the Israelis a more generous vision of the future than permanent occupation? Why not encourage the doves in Israel, rather than the hawks?

A. There are no doves or hawks on the other side—only Israelis. They have convinced themselves that they are quite happy where they are. It's hopeless to change it. Everything we have offered hasn't made the slightest difference in their outlook. And when the Libyan airliner was shot down with 108 civilians killed, every paper in Israel backed this barbarian act. So how can I change their thinking? The situation is hopeless and —make no mistake—highly explosive.

Q. What incentive does the U.S. have to pressure Israel? How can you persuade the major powers that a change in the status quo would be better for all parties concerned? Some geopoliticians are now arguing that with the Soviets out of Egypt and the Arab oil producers profitably dealing with the U.S., there is no pressing reason for change.

A. From one aspect that is correct. But the U.S. will be committing the gravest error in its history if it continues to believe we are crippled and can't take much action. The situation here will—mark my words—be much worse than Vietnam. Because here your vital interests are at stake. You Americans always use computers to solve geopolitical equations and they always mislead you. [Former Secretary of Defense Robert] McNamara warned [President] Johnson that by feeding the wrong data into the computers he was getting all the wrong answers. Well, McNamara was right and Johnson was wrong—and compelled to abdicate. You simply forgot to feed Vietnamese psychology into the computer. I told [Sen. Edmund] Muskie at this very table that the U.S. has overlooked one factor—Arab psychology. I am quite ready to entertain a rosy future in the area for all parties if we have peace based on justice. Otherwise this will be the nightmare to end all nightmares—and everybody will be losers.

Q. What would it take to break the deadlock at this juncture?

A. I did my best. I've run out of ideas.

Q. Would total defeat be preferable to the present no-war-no-peace situation?

A. The Arabs will never be totally defeated. But we can have several more defeats as in 1967 and survive and eventually the conqueror will have to give up, as all conquerors have through history.

Q. Last year, after the withdrawal of Soviet military advisers from Egypt, you told me Nixon would be in for a "long, hot autumn" (NEWSWEEK, Aug. 7, 1972). What did you mean?

A. I had my plans at that time. But they were changed for many reasons. I gave my word that I would await the U.S. elections before moving. I waited and again my plans were interrupted.

Q. To whom did you give your word and by whom were plans interrupted?

A. Many circles. But now the time has come for a decision. After all our contacts, the situation has become very clear. The time has come for a shock. Diplomacy will continue before, during and after the battle.

Wally McNamee—Newsweek

Ismail and Nixon: 'Complete failure and despair sums it up'

Q. You mentioned in your speech this week that some European friends told you nothing would happen unless you did something to show you cared about your cause. Who are they and what did they mean?

A. All West Europeans are telling us the same thing. And what's more they are right. Everyone has fallen asleep over the Mideast crisis. But they will soon wake up to the fact that Americans have left us no other way out.

Q. In other words, one has to fight in order to be able to talk?

A. At the very least. As you say, times have changed. And everything is changing here, too—for the battle.

Q. I can only conclude from what you say that you believe a resumption of hostilities is the only way out?

A. You are quite right. Everything in this country is now being mobilized in earnest for the resumption of the battle —which is now inevitable.

Q. Washington would like to reconcile Israeli security requirements with Egypt's sovereignty over its own territory. Why

No Objection To Declassification in Full 2011/04/29 : LOC-HAK-136-7-17-5

No Objection To Declassification in Full 2011/04/29 : LOC-HAK-136-7-17-5

should the two needs be incompatible?

A. If you are talking about real sovereignty, they are not incompatible. But Washington is talking about nominal Egyptian sovereignty over Sinai. Let me be frank, this issue of Israeli security is a catch-all. We, too, need security. They are occupying territories in three Arab countries. The U.S. is giving them the most up-to-date weaponry. They are striking deeper and deeper into Lebanon. Backed by the U.S., they are trying to impose their will in the area. Hitler couldn't do it. And they won't succeed either.

Q. Why would a demilitarized Sinai Peninsula be an infringement on Egyptian sovereignty?

A. Because [the Israelis] can come back anytime they want in a few hours.

Q. But is the present situation better than a demilitarized Sinai?

A. Let's see if they can stay like this. I say they can't. And you will soon see who was right.

Q. Golda Meir has indicated that Israel's only security interest in Sinai is Sharm el Sheikh. Isn't this worth exploring anew? Why do you consider compromise so shameful?

A. We will agree to anything for Sharm and guarantee freedom of [Israeli] navigation [but not] Israeli occupation. We will turn it over to the international community under any formula they think desirable—the Big Five of the Security Council, including China, with their troops, or neutral forces under their guarantee. But to have Israeli troops come and go as they please into Sharm is out of the question.

Q. In the light of the Khartoum incident, would you agree that Black September can now veto anything it disagrees with?

A. Anything can happen when people are that desperate. You can't ignore them in any future settlement. In Vietnam you sat down with all sides. Why not in the Mideast?

Q. Should Kissinger sit down with Al Fatah leader Yasir Arafat?

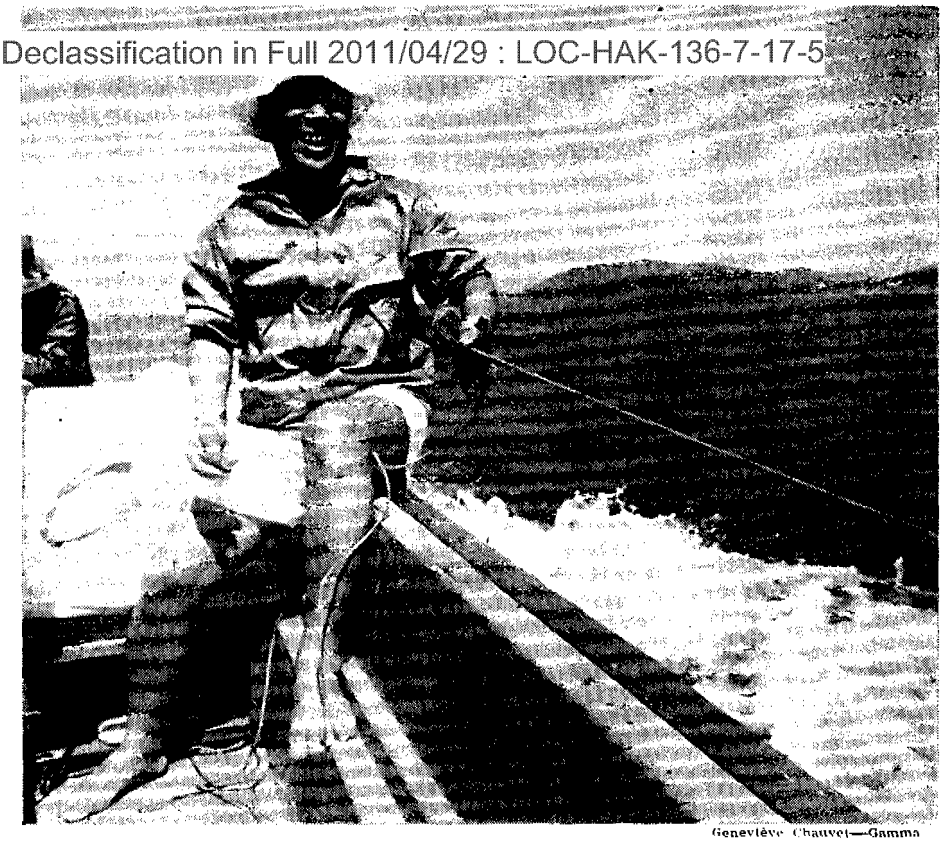
A. That's an intelligent question. But it's up to them to decide. Perhaps it's a new approach.

Q. How can you be better prepared today than before the Soviet pullout?

A. [The Russians] never had a political role here. I always mentioned two principles to them: (1) We don't need a single Soviet soldier and (2) We do not intend to provoke a confrontation between the superpowers to help us.

Q. But what about equipment and spare parts?

A. [The Russians] are providing us now with everything that's possible for them to supply. And I am now quite satisfied.



Geneviève Chauvel—Gamma

Thieu goes fishing: Casting himself in a new mold

Time Out for Image-Polishing

From Khe Sanh and Tet through the 1972 Communist offensive, he was the trustee of America's investment in Vietnam. But all this time, South Vietnam's President Nguyen Van Thieu has remained an enigma to most Americans. This week, the U.S. public will get a chance for a close-up look at the elusive Vietnamese leader. In his first official trip to the continental United States (he has been to Hawaii for wartime conferences), Thieu will meet for two days with President Nixon at San Clemente, then move on for an equally important mission—polishing his image with the Congress and the public. He arrives at a symbolic moment—as America's direct military involvement ends and the Vietnamese political tug of war begins.

The curtain came down on America's combat role in Vietnam in ceremonies in Hanoi and Saigon last week. In the North Vietnamese capital, thousands of Communists assembled at Gia Lam Airport to smile and wave as the last group of U.S. prisoners of war was released. By contrast, the departure of the final 2,500 American soldiers from South Vietnam (except for 210 Marine guards and other military personnel at the U.S. Embassy) was a spare, almost somber affair. "Our mission has been accomplished," Gen. Frederick Weyand, the departing U.S. commander, told a small crowd of Vietnamese at Tan Son Nhut Airport. Weyand was not the only high-ranking American official to bid farewell to Vietnam last week. After six years as ambassador to Saigon, 78-year-old Ellsworth Bunker resigned, to be replaced by Graham Martin, 60, former ambassador to Italy and Thailand.

The war that lasted longer than any other in U.S. history and which cost the lives of 45,943 Americans could still claim more victims. In his television address last week, Mr. Nixon again warned Hanoi of "the consequences" if the Communists failed to live up to the peace agreement—another hint that the U.S. has not entirely ruled out a resumption of bombing raids against North Vietnam. Administration aides also said last week that bombing missions in Cambodia would continue until Communist forces there agreed to a cease-fire. A number of critics contended that with U.S. troops now gone from Indochina and the Tonkin Gulf resolution rescinded, the President no longer had constitutional authority for the bombing—but the White House seemed not to take this legal challenge very seriously.

Support: The Administration's hard line fitted in nicely with Thieu's plans. According to Vietnamese officials, Thieu will ask Mr. Nixon for a reaffirmation of U.S. support for South Vietnam's sovereignty and a firm guarantee of economic aid—including the money to support Saigon's 1.1 million-man army. But the larger purpose of his trip was to meet with Congressional, business and labor leaders in Washington in an effort, as one U.S. official put it, "to persuade his critics that he is not just another petty dictator."

Clearly, the President would very

No Objection To Declassification in Full 2011/04/29 : LOC-HAK-136-7-17-5